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COMMUNICATION

WORKER AND FATHERLAND:

A NOTE ON A PASSAGE IN THE *COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

I

There is a passage in the *Communist Manifesto* which discusses the attitude of the workers to their country. It reads:

The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality.

The working men have no country. We can not take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.

National differences and antagonisms between peoples are vanishing gradually from day to day, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.

The supremacy of the proletariat will cause them to vanish still faster. United action, of the leading civilised countries at least, is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.¹

And on a preceding page, the *Manifesto* says: "Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie."²

These passages have been cited innumerable times in socialist literature, usually in order to justify the negative attitude of the socialist labor movement toward bourgeois patriotism and chauvinism. Often, however, the attempt has been made to temper the stern language of these passages and to give them a contrary, nationalist meaning.

1 Marx-Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York, 1948), p. 28.

2 Ibid., p. 20.

As an example, we may cite Heinrich Cunow, the well-known German Social Democratic theoretician who discusses the above passages in his book *Die Marxsche Geschichts-, Gesellschafts- und Staatstheorie*. According to Cunow, all that Marx and Engels wanted to say was:

Today (1848) the worker has no country, he does not take part in the life of the nation, has no share in its material and spiritual wealth. But one of these days the workers will win political power and take a dominant position in state and nation and then, when so to speak [?] they will have *constituted themselves the nation*, they will also be national and feel national, even though their nationalism [!] will be of a different kind than that of the bourgeoisie.³

This interpretation by Cunow⁴ stumbles over a little phrase, the phrase "so far" ("Since the proletariat . . . must constitute itself the nation, it is, *so far*, itself national"), which indicates that Marx and Engels did not expect the proletariat to remain "national" for ever.

Cunow's interpretation became the standard one in the reformist literature; but after World War II, it found acceptance in the Communist camp as well. Thus, we read in the "Introduction" to the edition of the *Manifesto* published by the Stern-Verlag in Vienna in 1946:

When Marx says in the *Communist Manifesto*: "Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, *so far*, itself national," we must understand that it is precisely in our time that the working class acts as a national class, as the backbone of the nation in the struggle against fascism and for democracy. The working class of Austria is fighting today to win its Austrian fatherland by creating an independent, free and democratic Austria.⁵

This, moreover, is not only the same as Cunow's interpretation, but even goes beyond it. In complete contrast to these nationalistic interpretations, Lenin wrote in his famous essay "Karl Marx":

The nation is a necessary product, and inevitable form, in the bourgeois epoch of social development. The working class can not grow strong, can not mature, can not consolidate its forces, except by "constituting itself the nation," without being "national" ("though not in the bourgeois sense of the word"). But the development of capitalism tends to break down national boundaries, does away with national iso-

³ (Berlin, 1921), Vol. II, p. 30.

⁴ Cunow was not the first to interpret the *Manifesto* in this sense. Like many other reformist innovations, this too originates with the founder of revisionism, Eduard Bernstein, who says, in an article on "The German Social Democracy and the Turkish Tangle" (*Neue Zeit*, 1896-7, Nr. 4, pp. 111 ff.): "The statement that the proletariat has no country is amended where, when and to the extent that he can participate as a full citizen in the government and legislation of his country, and is able to change its institutions according to his wishes."

⁵ The idea that the Austrian workers might have wanted to fight for socialism in their country, apparently did not even occur to the writer of the "Introduction."

lation, substitutes class antagonisms for national antagonisms. In the more developed capitalist countries it is perfectly true that "the workers have no fatherland" and that "united action" of the workers, in the civilized countries at least, "is one of the first conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat."⁶

Yet, even Lenin's interpretation is not altogether satisfactory. While, according to the *Manifesto*, the proletariat, even after winning political supremacy, will be "so far, itself national," Lenin restricts this "being national" *only to the beginnings of the working-class movement*, before the working class "comes of age." In a *fully developed* capitalist society, says Lenin, the workers more than ever will have *no fatherland!*

It is not strange that a number of socialist authors attempted to find Marx's real meaning. It is much stranger that in the course of time, these passages became a sort of credo, that far-reaching programmatic slogans were derived from them, even if the words of the *Manifesto* were not fully understood. This applies in particular to the statement that the workers have "no country." It was much easier to repeat it constantly than to *explain* this apparently simple sentence and bring it into agreement with the everyday *practice* of the Socialist (and later the Communist) parties. And, unfortunately, this practice seemed more and more to give the lie to the authors of the *Manifesto*.

II

What is then the actual meaning of the statements of the *Manifesto*? In what sense do the workers have "no country," and how is it that, nonetheless, even after acquiring supremacy they will still remain "so far, national"? To answer this question, it would seem, we must first examine the terminology of the *Manifesto*.

It is well known that the terms "nation" and "nationality" are not always and everywhere used in the same sense. In English and in French, for example, a "nation" is usually taken to mean the population of a *sovereign state*, and the word "nationality" is taken to be either a synonym of citizenship, or to designate a mere *community of descent and language* (a "people," or "Volk"), whereas in Germany and in Eastern Europe *both* terms refer primarily to communities of descent and languages.⁷

6 V. I. Lenin, *The Teachings of Karl Marx*, (New York, 1930), p. 31.

7 K. Kautsky says on this subject: "The concept of the nation is likewise hard to delimit. The difficulty is not decreased by the fact that two different social formations are denoted by the same word, and the same formation by two different words. In Western Europe, with its old capitalist culture, the people of each state feels closely tied to it. There, the population of a state is designated as the na-

Marx and Engels, especially in their early writings, almost always followed the English and French usage. They used the word "nation" primarily to designate the population of a sovereign state (by way of exception, they also applied this term to "historical" peoples, such as the Poles, who had been, temporarily, deprived of a state of their own). "Nationality," on the other hand, meant to them: 1) either belonging to a state, specifically, a people having a state,⁸ or 2) a mere ethnic community. Accordingly, this is almost the only term they used in relation to the so-called "peoples without history," such as the Austrian Slavs (Czechs, Croats, etc.) and Roumanians, or to "remnants of peoples," such as Gaels, Bretons and Basques. And just this concept of "nationality" (in sharp contrast to that of "nations," by which they understood a people which had a state of its own and, therefore, its own political history) was most characteristic of the terminology of Marx and Engels! We cite some examples:

The Highland Gaels and the Welsh [said Engels in the journal *The Commonwealth* in 1866] are undoubtedly of different *nationalities* to what the English are, although nobody will give to these remnants of peoples long gone by the title of *nations*, any more than to the Celtic inhabitants of Brittany in France. . . .⁹

And in the article "Germany and Panslavism" (1855) he says of the Austrian Slavs:

We can distinguish two groups of Austrian Slavs. One group consists of remnants of *nationalities*, whose own history belongs to the past and whose present historical development is tied up with that of *nations* of different race and speech. . . . Consequently, these *nationalities*, although living exclusively on Austrian soil, are in no way constituted as different *nations*.¹⁰

In another place Engels says:

Neither Bohemia nor Croatia possessed the power to exist as *nations* by themselves. Their *nationalities*, gradually undermined by historical factors which cause

tion. In this sense, for example, we speak of a Belgian nation. The further east we go in Europe, the more numerous are the portions of the population in a state that do not wish to belong to it, that constitute national communities of their own within it. They too are called 'nations' or 'nationalities.' It would be advisable to use only the latter term for them." (*Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung* [Berlin, 1929], Vol. II, p. 441.)

⁸ See Marx's speech on Poland dated February 22, 1848: "The three powers [*viz.*, Prussia, Austria and Russia] marched along with history. In 1846, when incorporating Cracow into Austria they confiscated the last ruins of the Polish *nationality*. . . ." (MEGA, VI, p. 408; see also *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, p. 247.) Here too, as in many other passages in Marx and Engels, "nationality" refers to nothing but government.

⁹ *Grünbergs Archiv*, VI, pp. 215 ff.

¹⁰ *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, p. 229.

their absorption by more vigorous races, can expect to win back some sort of independence only if they link themselves with other Slavic *nations*" [Engels refers here to Russia].¹¹

How much importance Engels attached to the terminological differentiation of the concepts of "nation" and "nationality" can be seen from the article cited from the *Commonwealth*, in which he makes a sharp distinction *between the "national" and the "nationality" questions, between the "national" and the "nationality" principles*. He approved only the first principle, vigorously *rejecting* the second. (As is well known, Marx and Engels mistakenly denied a political future to the "peoples without history"—Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Ukrainians, Roumanians, etc.)¹²

III

The *Communist Manifesto*, also, provides a number of instances of this use of terminology. When it speaks, for example, of the "national industries" being undermined by the development of capitalism,¹³ it evidently refers to industries confined to the territory of a given state. The "Nationalfabriken" (in the English version, "factories owned by the State") referred to at the end of the second section are, of course, to be understood in the same sense. And in the sentence: "Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one *nation*, with one government, one code of laws, one *national* class interest, one frontier and one custom tariff,"¹⁴ the words "nation" and "national" refer evidently to the state, the people having a state, and not to the nationality in the sense of descent and language. Finally, when in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels speak of a "*national*" *struggle of the proletariat*, this means something quite different from the reformist and neo-reformist interpretations. This is clear from the following passage, which portrays the origin of the proletarian class struggle:

At first the contest is carried on by individual laborers, then by the work-people of a factory, then by the operatives of one trade, in one locality, against the individual bourgeois who directly exploits them. . . . It was just this contact that was needed to centralize the numerous local struggles, all of the same character, into one *national* struggle between classes.¹⁵

11 *Revolution und Kontrerevolution in Deutschland*, pp. 62 ff.

12 See my monograph: "Fr. Engels und das Problem der 'geschichtslosen' Völker," in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, IV, pp. 87-282.

13 *Communist Manifesto*, p. 12.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Here, the "national" struggle of the proletariat, i.e., the struggle waged on the scale of the entire state, is equated directly with the class struggle, since only such a centralization of the struggles of the workers on the scale of the state could oppose the workers as *class* to the *class* of bourgeoisie and give these struggles the stamp of *political* struggles.¹⁶ To return to the passage cited at the outset, when Marx and Engels speak of the struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie as one that is "*at first national*," they evidently have in mind a struggle waged at first within the framework of a *single state*, as is clear from the reason given, that "the proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie." But from this point of view, the statement of the rise of the proletariat "*to be the leading class of the nation*," its constituting itself "*the nation*," likewise takes on a very definite meaning. It says that the proletariat must at first be guided by existing state borders, must rise to be the leading class *within the existing states*! That is *why* it will at first be "*so far, national*"—"though not in the bourgeois sense of the word"—for the bourgeoisie sees its goal as political detachment of the peoples from each other and exploitation of foreign nations by its own. On the other hand, the victorious working class will from the beginning work towards the elimination of national hostilities and antagonisms of peoples. By its hegemony it will create conditions under which "the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end." It is only from this standpoint that it is possible to understand what the young Engels meant when he wrote of the "abolition" or "annihilation" of nationality: certainly not the "abolition" of the existing ethnic and linguistic communities (this would have been absurd!), but of the *political* delimitations of peoples.¹⁷ In a society in which (in the words of the *Manifesto*) "the public power will lose its political character" and *the state as such will wither away*, there can be no room for separate "national states."

16 Cf. *Die deutsche Ideologie*: "Precisely because the bourgeoisie is no longer an estate, but a class, it is compelled to organize itself *nationally*, no longer locally, and to give its average interests a general form." (MEGA, V, p. 52.)

17 Along these lines, Engels wrote in 1846: "Only the proletarians can abolish nationality; only the awaking proletariat can allow various nations to fraternize." (MEGA, IV, p. 460.) Similarly, in the *deutsche Ideologie* the proletariat is referred to as a class that is "already the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc., within present-day society, . . . in which nationality is already abolished." (*Ibid.*, V, pp. 60 and 50; and cf. *ibid.*, V, p. 454.)

IV

We feel that our analysis of the terminology of the *Manifesto* is more than a mere philological "hair-splitting." It has shown that the passages in question relate primarily to "nation" and "nationality" in the *political* sense, and are, therefore, inconsistent with earlier interpretations. This applies especially to the thoroughly arbitrary and sophisticated explanation by Cunow, who tried to derive a specific "proletarian nationalism" from the *Manifesto* and reduced the internationalism of the working-class movement to the desire for international cooperation among peoples.¹⁸ But neither did the *Manifesto* preach that the proletariat should be indifferent with respect to national movements, should display a sort of "nihilism" in questions of nationality. When the *Manifesto* says that the workers "have no country," this refers to the *bourgeois national state*, not to nationality in the ethnical sense. The work-

18 The high point of Cunow's misreading of the *Manifesto* is perhaps the following passage in his book: "And it is just as unreasonable to conclude from the call, 'Workers of all countries, unite!' . . . , that Marx intended to say that the worker is outside the national community. No more than the call, 'Journalists, physicians, philologists, etc., get together in the international unions to carry out your tasks!' means that the members of these professional associations should not feel linked to their nationality. . . ." (*Op. cit.*, II, p. 29).

Cf. Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program*, 1875, whose point 5 reads:

"The working class strives for its emancipation first of all within the framework of the present-day national state, conscious that the necessary result of its efforts, which are common to the workers of all civilized countries, will be the international brotherhood of peoples."

On this Marx said: "*Lassalle*, in opposition to the *Communist Manifesto* and to all earlier socialism, conceived the workers' movement from the narrowest national standpoint. He is being followed in this—and that after the work of the International! It is altogether self-evident that, to be able to fight at all, the working class must organize itself at home *as a class* and that its own country is the immediate arena of its struggle. In so far its class struggle is national, not in substance, but, as the *Communist Manifesto* says, 'in form.' But the 'framework of the present-day national state,' for instance, the German Empire, is itself in its turn economically 'within the framework' of the world market, politically 'within the framework' of the system of states. Every business man knows that German trade is at the same time foreign trade, and the greatness of Herr Bismarck consists, to be sure, precisely in his pursuing a kind of *international* policy. And to what does the German workers' party reduce its internationalism? To the consciousness that the result of its efforts will be 'international brotherhood of peoples'—a phrase borrowed from the bourgeois League of Peace, which is intended to pass as equivalent to the international brotherhood of the working classes in the joint struggle against the ruling classes and their governments. Not a word, therefore, about the international functions of the German working class!" (*Selected Works*, II, pp. 25 f.)

ers "have no country," because, according to Marx and Engels, they must regard the bourgeois national state as a machinery for their oppression,¹⁹ and after they have achieved power they will likewise have "no country" in the political sense, inasmuch as the separate socialist national states *will be only a transitional stage on the way to the classless and stateless society of the future*, since the construction of such a society *is possible only on an international scale!* Thus, the "indifferentist" interpretation of the *Manifesto* that was customary in "orthodox" Marxist circles has no justification. The fact that, by and large, this interpretation did little harm to the socialist movement, and in some sense even furthered it, is due to the circumstance that it reflected (although in a distorted way) the *inherent cosmopolitan tendency of the worker's movement*,²⁰ its effort to overcome national narrow-mindedness and the "national separations and antagonisms between peoples." In this sense, however, it was much *closer* to the spirit of Marxism and of the *Manifesto* than the nationalistic interpretation of Bernstein, Cunow and others.

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19 In one of his notebooks Marx excerpted the following from *Brissot de Warville*: "There is one insight that only those suspect who draw up plans of education for the people, that there can be no virtue since $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people have no property; for without property the people *have no country*, without a country everything is against them, and for their part they must be armed against all.... Since this is the luxury of $\frac{3}{4}$ of bourgeois society, it follows that these $\frac{3}{4}$ can have neither religion nor morality nor attachment to the Government...." (MEGA, VI, p. 617.)

20 In his letter to Sorge of September 12-17, 1874, Engels wrote of the "common *cosmopolitan* interests of the proletariat." This is an interesting contrast to the derogatory connotation which the word "cosmopolitanism" has assumed in the political vocabulary of the Soviet Union.